The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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No. 30 MAY 22nd, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

Owing to the printing arrangements during Whitsuntide, our last issue went to press on the morning on which the country awoke to the news that the long-awaited storm had burst at last.

No words need be wasted on the cynical and callous disregard of the principles which make human society possible that has let loose the furies of war without warning on unoffending peoples. The Germans made it a charge against Holland and Belgium that they had fortified their eastern and not their western frontiers. There could be no more damning proof that these countries knew that respect for the rights of other peoples still survived in western civilisation while it had been wantonly repudiated across the Rhine. It is this difference in standards that is the moral justification of the war.

With the onset of total war and the change of Government in Great Britain to meet it, the war enters on a new phase. The next few weeks and months will be a searching test of the national character and capacity and of the quality of our Christian loyalty.

The outlook of the News-Letter is governed by the conviction that the war is essentially a war on two fronts. The changes in the national leadership must be judged from both points of view.

The sympathies and prayers of the nation are with those who are called to guide its destinies in what is perhaps the greatest peril which it has encountered in its history. Everything the nation has will have to be thrown into the struggle.

Intense as is the national effort to secure victory, yet more intense must be the spiritual effort to hold before our eyes the ends which alone give the war a meaning. The eternal truths and standards which give worth and dignity to human life are our lodestar in war as in peace.

Lord Lothian, speaking last week in New York, described the two alternatives before which we stand. On the one hand, Western civilisation may plunge into a darker age than we have ever known before. On the other, we may rise to levels of national unselfishness, vision and dedication which may give to mankind the greatest new birth of freedom it has ever known.

The energies of the Government are necessarily and properly concentrated on meeting the requirements of the military front. It is all the more incumbent on the Church and all the other agencies which shape public opinion to keep before the nation the vital importance of the spiritual front. The intensification of the war on the one front calls for a corresponding increase of spiritual energy on the other. Must we not as Christians dedicate ourselves anew to this task?

The Ministry of Information occupies a border-line position between the prosecution of the national war effort and the education of the public mind in regard to the

purposes of the war and the terms of peace. I have no qualifications for judging the abilities of the new Minister for the discharge of some of the responsibilities of his office. With some of his recent utterances regarding the causes, meaning and aims of the war I am in acute disagreement.

An illustration of the confused thinking in the minds of many people and of the failure to realise that unless victory is achieved on the spiritual as well as the military front the war will have been fought in vain, was afforded in the debate in the House of Commons which preceded the change of Government. A gallant member maintained that what we needed more than anything else was a few more cads in our Government. These were required to bring into our conduct of the war a new element of ruthlessness, which is necessary because our cause is so precious. Our loyalty to-day, he went on to say, was not to a man, nor to a party, nor even to a country, but to those things which 2,000 years of Christian civilisation had built up and which we could not possibly let go. How can we defend Christian civilisation by becoming cads? These things that we cannot possibly let go are not like a suit of clothes that we can wear one day and lay aside on another. If they mean anything at all they are part of ourselves, determining our outlook, purposes and values.

JUSTICE IN WAR TIME

There are some things so important that it is worth while to go on repeating them until they cease to be merely interesting ideas and come to control our whole thinking and behaviour. One of these is that we can have a better social order in the future only by beginning to create it now. Last week's Supplement was a vigorous enforcement of the truth that the war is an opportunity.

It is an opportunity for the exaltation of the common good above selfish interest. In a letter to *The Times* of May 10th Sir George Schuster urged that we cannot achieve national unity unless the whole people are satisfied that all are working under the inspiration of public service rather than of private profit. To put it crudely and briefly, as he says, he would like to see a notice over every factory and place of business: "This business is being run for the duration of the war for account of the British Government."

To take another illustration, it is plain that as the war goes on there will be a shortage of necessaries. What are we going to do about it? Shall we insist that the necessities of life be distributed equally to all irrespective of income, even if this means for many of us limitation of our consumption of non-necessaries or luxuries? Is that not a limitation to be cheerfully accepted rather than that others should suffer hardship injurious to life and health? To demand such a policy is one obvious way of giving expression in war time to our Christian convictions about the right relations of men to one another.

Again, one of the great weaknesses in the British Empire has been the strength of colour prejudice and the extent of racial discrimination, and the war is helping to break down these barriers. When the last war began there was a strong prejudice against non-Europeans getting into English regiments. A strong effort resulted in the admission of some Indians and Ceylonese, and some of these obtained commissions after hard service. When the present war started no African had any chance of getting into the British forces. The door has now been opened and at least one African is being trained as an officer, and others are entering through the ranks. Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, whose tenure of the office of Colonial Secretary has been marked by generous sympathy with the peoples of the Colonial Empire and valuable construc-

tive effort on their behalf, gave assurances to the League of Coloured Peoples that there would be no discrimination in the Army, Navy or Air Force, and that he would do all in his power to ensure that no member of the Colonial Empire would be debarred from assisting in the war effort on account of his colour.

A LESSON FROM ITALY

In an interesting article in *The Tablet* of May 11th a writer who has returned from a month in Italy calls attention to a feature in the situation which deserves the closest attention, not only on account of its influence on Italian policy, but as a warning of dangers against which we have to be on our guard in all countries. The real and decisive force in Italy, the article suggests, is the body of young Fascists of an active and adventurous temperament. The more the Party dominates the life of the nation, the greater is the power they wield. We may easily be misled by our habit of personifying nations. We see what the national interest as a whole is in a particular matter and forget that the interest of key individuals may be quite different. There are young Fascists quite unmoved by the idea that the Axis may bring Italy into a position of vassalage to Germany; what fills their minds is the thought that it enhances their own dominance in their districts. Those who think that the Monarchy or the Papacy or influential Italians outside the Party can avail much against the young, active Fascists, supported by German influence, are quite out of touch with the real forces in the subterranean struggle.

The lesson which we as Christians in this country have to lay to heart is that the youth of all European countries are being accustomed to methods of violence. The spirit of toleration and compromise, freedom of speech, all balances and checks on political life, have on the Continent been swept aside by those who believe in violence. It is plain that if Christianity is to be an effective force in this kind of world it must acquire a new virility. The flow of speech and debating of resolutions dear to religious gatherings, the amiable insipidities of parish and congregational life, the petty concerns which often engage the attention of ecclesiastical assemblies are absurd irrelevancies. The real tests are active participation in the political struggle and readiness to suffer persecution or martyrdom.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

During the coming weeks we shall all be suffering from acute strain, conscious and unconscious. Few will be without personal grounds for fear and anxiety, and beyond this there is pressing on all our spirits an accumulated power of evil. Satanic forces have broken loose in such volume that the whole atmosphere which we breathe has become polluted. We are experiencing on a world scale what Jesus knew and felt when He said: "This is your hour and the power of darkness."

What is the antidote? Plainly that we should deliberately take time to fortify our minds with the truth that the Light has shone, and is shining, in the darkness; to remind ourselves every morning that *God is Light*. This is not merely an act of faith that the universe has a meaning and that the things that abide are truth, goodness and love. It is the joyful affirmation that *the Word was made flesh*; that actually on this earth the truth and inner meaning of things has been made known, that the victory has been won, that the Kingdom of God is already here, and that we may enter into its peace and power. By each act of faith we are contributing to the conquest of the spiritual forces of darkness by those of light, just as each individual act of valour brings victory nearer in the military sphere. We need to enter in living

experience into the confidence of Saint Paul that where sin abounded grace much more abounds; that the power of evil is not strong enough to overcome the power of God unto goodness.

The demands of the spiritual warfare are much in the minds of some of our members. Several letters have reached me on the subject. They contain a number of practical suggestions, such as the need for a national day of prayer, or the suggestion that in a particular locality arrangements might be made for a continuous chain of prayer throughout twenty-four hours. I do not undervalue corporate effort in prayer. It has just been announced that at the suggestion of His Majesty the King next Sunday will be observed as a national day of prayer. Other suggestions may well receive consideration from those who are in a position to take action. Effectual prayer, however, does not depend on organisation. The essential thing is the consecration, discipline and faithfulness of the individual. Those who know that the spiritual world is the real world will dedicate themselves to winning victories in the life of the spirit with the same devotion that the youth of the nation is giving itself to the service of our country.

" We realise at the Front," wrote a soldier during the last war, " that the issues of life and death are not in our hands. We take the one step and trust the rest. It is the beginning of the peace of God." We can serve God and our people by entering into the peace and calm which are God's gift. In so doing we shall not only renew our own strength, but be a source of strength to others, helping to create a spirit of confidence and resolution.

TOWARDS £500

In our last issue we appealed to our members to contribute according to their ability towards a fund of £500 to meet the increased cost of postage in existing subscriptions. Before the appeal was made we received contributions amounting to £49 13s. 6d., and on the day following the publication of our last issue a further sum of £43 7s. 6d., making a total of £93 1s. 0d. It will relieve us of a burden if the whole amount can be provided as quickly as possible.

BOUND VOLUMES

The bound volumes of the first twenty-six numbers of the News-Letter ought to be an acceptable present to a number of people who are anxious to secure a complete set of the Christian News-Letters, which we are now unable to furnish in any other form. There is only a limited number of these bound volumes at the price of 8s. 6d. This offer is available only till May 31st, after which date it will be necessary for us to raise the price. Those members who want bound volumes are advised to apply at once.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

Subscriptions. — The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by St. Clements Press, Ltd., Portugal Street, London, W.C.2.